



The Literary Merit of the New Gallus

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THE LITERARY MERIT OF THE NEW GALLUS

Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since Duncan F. Kennedy coined the memorable phrase “those wretched lines from Qaṣr Ibrīm” to describe the contents of the New Gallus.¹ His response was not atypical. Even R. G. M. Nisbet in the *editio princeps* could not refrain from commenting on the “austere diction” of the papyrus fragment,² and his collaborator P. J. Parsons soon after published his own disparaging comments on the quality of the lines in the *London Review of Books* on February 7, 1980. The question of literary merit evidently dominated the panel discussion on the New Gallus at the annual APA meeting on December 28 of that year, in which papers were presented by Elaine Fantham, Michael Putnam, John Van Sickle, Florence Verducci, and James Zetzel.³ Critics were woefully disappointed, not only because Gallus had long been assumed to be the first great exponent of Latin love elegy, but also because David Ross had recently written a book reconstructing the marvels of Gallus’ elegy and detailing its impact on the early works of Vergil and Propertius.⁴ But the papyrus find seemed only to confirm the impression of Zetzel that Gallus was no very remarkable poet, and that the Gallus recovered by Ross was largely the literary creation of Vergil.⁵ The metrical solecisms, syntactical awkwardness, archaizing features, and bland contents of the New Gallus even led Franz Brunhölzl to question the authenticity of the papyrus fragment,⁶ and while his arguments have been largely dismantled,⁷ and the *communis opinio* accepts the attribution of the lines to C. Cornelius Gallus,⁸ very few scholars have attempted

1. D. F. Kennedy, “Gallus and the *Culex*,” *CQ* 32 (1982): 371.

2. R. D. Anderson, P. J. Parsons, and R. G. M. Nisbet, “Elegiacs by Gallus from Qaṣr Ibrīm,” *JRS* 69 (1979): 149. This is the *editio princeps*, which I will cite throughout (henceforth, APN).

3. As reported by J. Van Sickle, “Style and Imitation in the New Gallus,” *QUCC* 38 (1981): 122.

4. D. O. Ross, *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy, and Rome* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975).

5. J. E. G. Zetzel, “Gallus, Elegy, and Ross,” *CP* 72 (1977): 254–55.

6. F. Brunhölzl, “Der sogenannte Galluspapyrus von Kaṣr Ibrīm,” *CodMan* 10 (1984): 33–40.

7. J. Blänsdorf, “Der Gallus-Papyrus: Eine Fälschung?” *ZPE* 57 (1987): 43–50; G. Ballaira, “Per l’ autenticità del papiro di C. Cornelio Gallo di Qaṣr Ibrīm,” *Paideia* 42 (1987): 47–54.

8. For a notable exception, cf. G. Giangrande, “An Alleged Fragment of Gallus,” *QUCC* 34 (1980): 141–53; id., “On the Pseudo-Gallus,” *CL* 2 (1982): 83–93.

systematically to defend the literary merit of the New Gallus.⁹ At best, the modern state of scholarship can be defined as a grudging acceptance that these “wretched lines from Qasr Ibrîm” are all we have to work with, and let us make of them what we can. The purpose of this article is threefold: first to defend those features of the New Gallus that have been unjustly criticized, next to point out certain merits of the fragment that have often been overlooked, and finally to account for what it is in these lines that so disappoints us and offer a new analysis that I hope will mitigate, if not entirely reverse, that disappointment.

In the first place, it must be noted that the often-cited metrical solecisms are not really what they seem. The first is the hiatus after *tum* in the first line of the central quatrain (Gallus *P Qasr Ibrîm* 2):

fata mihi, Caesar, tum erunt mea dulcia, quom tu

Brunhölzl had argued that no Roman author would allow *tum erunt*,¹⁰ but in this he seems utterly to have ignored the parallels cited in the *editio princeps* for such hiatus in Lucretius (2.681, 3.394, 1082, 6.276), and even in Horace (*Sat.* 2.2.28).¹¹ This kind of hiatus may be somewhat archaic, but it hardly seems fair to criticize in Gallus what we find also in Horace. The second apparent metrical solecism in this line is the hexameter ending in two monosyllables, yet this feature, too, can be paralleled in poets who are known to have been heavily influenced by Gallus, inasmuch as it is found in Propertius 2.18.19, 33.23, as well as in *Culex* 223.¹² This feature, too, is old fashioned, perhaps, being associated mainly with the hexameter verse of Ennius (*Ann. frag.* 258 Vahlen):

non semper vestra evertit; nunc Iuppiter hac stat

and used by Vergil ordinarily when he is trying to evoke Ennius (*Aen.* 12.565):¹³

ne qua meis dictis esto mora: Iuppiter hac stat

It may seem a weak defense to say that the hexameter ending *quom tu* in the new Gallus is archaic, but still passable. But there is another dimension to the problem that puts the hexameter ending in a whole new light. As Van Sickle has noticed,

9. For a notable and admirable exception, cf. Van Sickle, “Style and Imitation” (n. 3 above). S. J. Heyworth (“A Note on the Gallus Fragment,” *LCM* 9 [1984]: 64) suggests that the fragment is an anthology, and that “omission by the anthologist has created the unbalanced and jejune group of verses that has caused scholars such a disappointment.” This is unlikely, however; see below, n. 24.

10. Brunhölzl, “Galluspapyrus” (n. 6 above), 36.

11. As C. Merriam (“The New Gallus Revisited,” *Latomus* 49 [1990]: 445) points out, the hiatus is well attested enough to be attributed to a Roman author, but too rare to be attributed to a forger, who would surely have attempted to make his or her lines accord with normal Roman metrical practice. The parallel of Catullus 97.1 (*dī ament*), cited by E. Courtney (*FPL*, ad loc.) is less precise inasmuch as it shows corruption of a long vowel rather than elision of a nasalized short vowel; but it does have the advantage that it provides a parallel for hiatus in the hexameter in elegiac verse.

12. For the influence of Gallus on the author of the *Culex*, cf. Kennedy, “Gallus” (n. 1 above).

13. On this type of “technical reference,” cf. R. Thomas, “Virgil’s *Georgics* and the Art of Reference,” *HSCP* 90 (1986): 179–81. Ancient scholars, too, allowed for exceptions to the general injunction against hexameters ending in monosyllables; cf. Servius ad *Aen.* 8.83: *sciendum tamen hoc esse vitiosum, monosyllabo finiri versum, nisi forte ipso monosyllabo minora explicentur animalia, ut “parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus”*: *gratiores enim versus isti sunt secundum Lucilium*. If ancient critics such as Servius and Lucilius so esteemed such metrical faults in the interest of poetic iconicity, then surely they would have allowed them in the interest of a Callimachean allusion.

Gallan hexameter more closely resembles the Catullan than the Vergilian in terms of ictus and accent coincidence in the fourth foot, and so perhaps in that sense, Nisbet is justified in characterizing Gallus' hexameters as "old-fashioned." But that is the same as criticizing Gallus for not anticipating the Vergilian metrical revolution. After all, it was Vergil who invented the avoidance of accent and ictus coincidence in the fourth foot. Is it fair to blame Gallus for not inventing it first? I for one am not disappointed that a poet who occupied a middle position chronologically between Catullus and Vergil should write accordingly.

There is, then, nothing to blame in Gallus' metrical usage. What of syntax and style? As far as syntax goes, the only abnormality is the copula agreeing with the predicate rather than the subject in person, at least in the papyrus (Gallus *P Qasr Ibrim* 2–3):¹⁸

FATA·MIHI·TVM·ERVNT·MEA·DVL·CIA·QVOM·TV
MAXIMA·ROMANAE·RS·ERIT·HISTORIAE·

But this is an obvious mistake, corrected to *eris* already in the *editio princeps*.¹⁹ As for style, there are two features that have been singled out as particularly old-fashioned. The first is the pleonasm of *mihi* and *mea* in line 2. But this pleonasm produces an interesting alternation of words referring to Gallus with those referring to Caesar: *mihi—Caesar—mea—tu*. As Putnam has noted, "this intertwining postulates an interconnection between the speaker and his addressee."²⁰ The effect is iconic (the position of the signifiers represents some quality of the signified): an advanced poetic technique that is a far cry from the kind of naive pleonasm we find in the archaic Latin poets. Apart from the pleonasm, there is also the triple chain alliteration in the sequence *domina deicere digna* in line 7 of the New Gallus. Such alliteration has a somewhat archaic air, it is true, reminding us especially of the speeches of Cato the Elder. But once again, it is a feature found also in Gallus' early contemporary Catullus, in polymetrics, epyllion, elegy, and epigram: *sint satis superque* (7.2), *miserunt mihi muneri* (12.15), *prisci praecepta parentis* (64.159), *cognatos compositum cineres* (68.98), *posse putare pium* (73.2), *purae pura puellae* (78b.1), *mentula magna minax* (115.8), and so forth. But Catullus is seldom called old-fashioned; indeed, as Ross has demonstrated at length, he was in the vanguard of Latin metrics and stylistics, in the epyllion and elegies especially.²¹ Once again, there seems to be a double standard: Catullus' apparent fondness for triple chain alliteration has never cast any shadow on his reputation as the Neoteric poet *par excellence*, but when Gallus uses the same device, he is "old-fashioned." In short, there is nothing metrically, syntactically, or stylistically that separates Gallus, as he emerges in the papyrus fragment, from the greatest artists in all of Roman poetry. At worst, there is a slight tendency toward archaism. But is that enough to make us moan at the mere mention of the New Gallus?

18. I here provide the transcript (APN, 138) rather than the edited text, in order to show the reading transmitted in the papyrus.

19. APN, 141. A. G. Lee ("The Gallan Elegiacs," *LCM* 5 [1980]: 45) is probably wrong to suggest that *erit* is the correct reading on the strength of frequent agreement of the copula in number with the predicate. Number and person behave very differently as syntactical categories, and inferences about the one should not be drawn from the behavior of the other.

20. M. Putnam, "Propertius and the New Gallus Fragment," *ZPE* 39 (1980): 50.

21. D. O. Ross, *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969).

On the other hand, there is much in the papyrus fragment that is praiseworthy. Leaving aside the allusions to Callimachus²² and Euphorion,²³ which reveal Gallus as a learned poet of whose company even Vergil would not be ashamed, we are immediately struck by the author's sense of balance and antithesis. We have already remarked upon the perfectly balanced alternation between Gallus and Caesar in line 2: *mihi—Caesar—mea—tu*. The *editio princeps* also notes the antithesis between *tristia* in line 1 and *dulcia* in the line 2.²⁴ This sense of balance reveals itself also in the patterned word pairs, discussed at length by Van Sickle.²⁵ We already expected to find such elaborate structures in Gallus' poetry, on the basis of the one line that we possessed before the discovery of the New Gallus (Gallus, p. 99 Morel = frag. 1 Courtney): *uno tellures dividit amne duas*. The numeral *uno* at the beginning of the pentameter is balanced by the numeral *duas* at the end, while the internal nouns with which they agree represent a contrast of their own (dry land versus water), both noun phrases being arranged chiastically around a central verb. The line truly is a work of art, and thus created a very high expectation about Gallus' technical ability. The New Gallus does not disappoint us. Of the five preserved pentameters in the papyrus, four show noun-adjective pairs distracted in such a way as to adjoin the central caesura and the line end (Gallus *P Qasr Ibrîm* 1, 3, 5, and 7):

a	B		A	b
tristia nequit[ia . . .]a, Lycori, tua				
a	b		A	B
maxima Romanae pars eri<s> historiae				
a	B		A	b
fixa legam spolieis deivitoria tueis				
A	B		a	b
quae possem domina deicere digna mea				

All these lines, moreover, begin with a word that agrees with another word after the main caesura. This metrical usage represents a great technical advance over the epigrams of Catullus (we should note also that there is not a single elision in the extant poetry of Gallus), and should be compared rather with that poet's elegies, and with those of the Augustan elegists. Gallus may not have perfected the Latin hexameter—that was left for Vergil—but he certainly showed later elegists the technical perfection possible in the Latin pentameter.²⁶ The poetry contained in the New Gallus, so far from being a stylistic disaster, is in fact a virtuoso performance of the

22. Van Sickle, "Style and Imitation," 119.

23. D. E. Keefe, "Gallus and Euphorion," *CQ* 32 (1982): 237–38.

24. APN, 141, noting the parallel of *Ecl.* 3.80–82. This semantic antithesis, along with the opposed themes of love and war, led J. Fairweather ("The Gallus Papyrus: A New Interpretation," *CQ* 34 [1984]: 167–74) to make the very sensible suggestion that the marginal marks that separate the central quatrain from the lines preceding and following in fact mark the change of contestant in an amoebean singing contest. One cannot be entirely sure, but this hypothesis seems to explain the most facts, and saves us the embarrassment of ignoring the marginal marks altogether (so Lee, "The Gallan Elegiacs" [n. 19 above]), or positing a collection of Gallan epigrams (so Lugusi, "Nota" [n. 15 above]). R. Whitaker's refutation of Fairweather ("Did Gallus Write 'Pastoral' Elegies?" *CQ* 38 (1988): 454–58) rests on very frail and debatable internal evidence in *Eclogue* 10 that is supposed to show that Gallus did not contain any bucolic element. Servius (ad *Ecl.* 6.72), at any rate, tells us that Gallus did compose at least one singing competition, adapted from Euphorion's account of the contest between Mopsus and Calchas.

25. Van Sickle, "Style and Imitation," 116–18.

26. J. Heyken, *Über die Stellung der Epitheta bei den römischen Elegikern* (Keil, 1916), 77–78.

kind that clearly impressed Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid, and that defined elegiac style for them. But if there is so little to blame in these lines of Gallus, and so much to praise, in what way do they really fall short of our expectations? What is it about them that so bitterly disappoints us?

Van Sickle was right, I think, to suggest that the source of our disappointment lies not in the quality of what we found, but in what we found.²⁷ Gallus was, after all, the father of Latin love elegy, and what we really wanted was some profound expression of love for Lycoris. The fragmentary first line of the papyrus, containing an almost Propertian lament for Lycoris' *nequitia*, serves only to tantalize the reader with what was lost before it, and to focus our disappointment on the encomium to Caesar²⁸ that follows. Whether such an encomium is inherently less interesting than love poetry, as Blänsdorf has remarked, "bleibt wohl Geschmackssache,"²⁹ though I think we as scholars would do well to follow Richard Whitaker's lead in analyzing the political dimensions of Gallus' poetry,³⁰ rather than to regret that we have found such an important historical document, spurning it in favor of some poetic expression of Gallus' personal feeling. But even if we are self-indulgent enough to condemn this hugely important precursor to the intense political engagement of Augustan poetry, are we right to feel disappointment in its literary merit?

To some extent, this question involves a subjective impression, and subjective impressions are something with which one can never argue. But it is possible to discuss the objectively observable aspects of the New Gallus. Let us begin by reading the central quatrain in its entirety (Gallus *P Qasr Ibrîm* 2–5):

fata mihi, Caesar, tum erunt mea dulcia, quom tu
 maxima Romanae pars eri(s) historiae,
 postque tuum reditum multorum templa deorum
 fixa legam spolieis deivitiorea tuis.

My fates will be sweet for me, O Caesar, when you will be the greatest part of Roman history, and after your return I will see the temples of many gods made richer, decorated with your spoils.

We have already observed the considerable poetic merits of these lines: the iconicity, the allusiveness, and the technical polish. The only really striking feature of this passage that may cause complaint is the extreme plainness of style and expression, especially in the use of "prosaic and semi-technical words":³¹ *historiae* (but Van Sickle notes a possible allusion to Hermesianax),³² and *reditum*. It is true, these

27. Van Sickle, "Style and Imitation," 122–23.

28. By using only the name Caesar, I hope studiously to avoid taking any position in the debate on whether the New Gallus refers to Julius Caesar or to Octavian—leaving aside the related question of the date of composition; cf. APN, 151–55; G. Zecchini, "Il primo frammento di Cornelio Gallo e la problematica partica nella poesia augustea," *Aegyptus* 60 (1980): 141; Putnam, "Propertius" (n. 20 above), 49, n. 2; R. Whitaker, "Apropos of the New Gallus Fragment," *Acta Classica* 24 (1981): 90–93; id., "Gallus and the 'Classical' Augustans (Vergil and Horace)," *PLLS* 4 (1983): 55–60; G. O. Hutchinson, "Notes on the New Gallus," *ZPE* 41 (1981): 37–42; D. West, "Paucā meo Gallo," *LCM* 8 (1983): 92–93.

29. Blänsdorf, "Der Gallus-Papyrus" (n. 7 above), 47.

30. Whitaker, "New Gallus" (n. 28 above).

31. APN, 149.

32. Van Sickle ("Style and Imitation," 119) calls our attention to the line of Hermesianax (frag. 7.22 Powell): Ἡσίοδον πάσης ἡρανον ἱστορίας. We observe that Gallus' *historiae* is in the same case and number as Hermesianax' ἱστορίας, and occupies the same metrical *sedes*.

words might be out of place in love poetry, although the phrase *Romanae . . . historiae* occurs in precisely the same metrical *sedes* in Propertius 3.4.10.³³ But we have to remember that, whether we like it or not, what we are reading is an encomium of Caesar. Is such plain, straightforward language really out of place in the praise of a contemporary political figure? I would like to adduce two parallels, both of which are four-line encomia to Augustus (Hor. *Carm.* 4.2.49–52 and Ov. *Tr.* 2.57–60):³⁴

teque dum procedit “io Triumphe!”
non semel dicemus, “io Triumphe!”
civitas omnis dabimusque divīs
tura benignis.

And as the procession moves along, we will say to you “O Triumph!”—more than once—
“O Triumph!” The whole city along with me will give incense to the benign gods.

optavi, peteres caelestia sidera tarde,
parsque fui turbae parva precantis idem,
et pia tura dedi pro te, cumque omnibus unus
ipse quoque adiuvī publica vota meis.

I prayed that you would seek the heavens only late, and I was a small part of the crowd
praying for the same; and I burned incense for you; and along with everyone else I
helped the public prayers with my own.

In both of these passages, a great poet, when he turns to the praise of the great *princeps*, is suddenly at a loss for words, and his accustomed eloquence vanishes as he becomes *pars turbae*. Ovid’s very plain sentence connectives sound particularly naive: “I prayed that you would seek the heavens only late; *and* I was a small part of the crowd praying for the same; *and* I burned incense for you; *and* along with everyone else I helped the public prayers with my own.” Horace purports to become *pars turbae* in an even more literal sense: he is part of the crowd who comes to see Augustus’ triumph over the Sygambri. Yet all Rome’s greatest lyric poet can manage to shout is *io Triumphe! io Triumphe!* along with the rest. Eduard Fraenkel’s reaction to this passage is well known: “Just as devotion to Augustus was not the privilege of any individual, but was felt by thousands of ordinary citizens, so the language in which that devotion was voiced should be one that seemed to come from the common man.”³⁵ Fraenkel is certainly right to think that the plain style of this passage is a literary choice that Horace felt was appropriate to the encomium of Augustus. But I take exception to Fraenkel’s apparent belief that this choice was motivated by Horace’s deep, patriotic love for Augustus. I would argue instead that the plain style of Horace’s encomium was a traditional affectation of that genre, which is found also in the New Gallus and in Ovid’s *Tristia* 2. It is certainly true that Horace’s partial trochaic septenarius in the stanza immediately preceding (*o sol pulcher, o laudande*) intimates a particularly contrived return to the popular origins of the Roman encomium, but that is precisely the point. Gallus, too, in this central quatrain, pictures

33. E. Courtney (*FPL*, ad loc.) cites this example, as well as the phrase *pars erit historiae* in *Consolatio ad Liviam* 267.

34. As printed in Shackleton Bailey’s edition.

35. E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), 439–40.

himself among the crowd as he admires the temples adorned with the spoils of Caesar's victory.³⁶ The fiction of the encomium is to become *pars turbae*, and so to adopt the language of the common man—what we may call the plain style of adulation.

I have deliberately taken these encomia by Horace and Ovid out of context, for it is in isolation that we must also read Gallus' encomium of Caesar. The chances of preservation make it impossible for us to know what the poetry around it was like: we get only tantalizing glimpses of Propertian erotic torment before, and Callimachean engagement with the critics after. Yet what would we think of Ovid, if all we possessed of his poetry was his brief encomium of Augustus in *Tristia* 2? Would we even guess that he was the author of the most bewilderingly complex and allusive epic poem in all of Latin literature? Then again, what would we think of Horace, if all we possessed of his poetry was the repeated cry of *io Triumphe! io Triumphe!* in *Odes* 4.2? Would we even guess at the Pindaric torrent that flows through the first six stanzas of the poem? No, we would no doubt take Horace for a bumpkin, rather than admire, as Fraenkel does, for he knows Horace's true abilities, the poet's talent for "expressing great things with perfect simplicity."³⁷ Yet no one, to my knowledge, has yet expressed admiration for Gallus' "perfect simplicity" in his encomium of Caesar. Kennedy, in the very article in which he denounces "those wretched lines from Qaşr İbrîm," admonishes us to "ask whether fragments have ever formed a firm basis for the evaluation of an author's work."³⁸ The warning is, I think, particularly apt in the case of the New Gallus, because of what it contains. We should not judge Gallus too harshly because, for the space of four lines, he adopted a very plain style in his encomium of Caesar: the greatest poets were guilty of it.

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36. I adopt here the "epigraphic reading" first proposed by Putnam ("Propertius," 49–56), in opposition to APN, who believed that Gallus was merely reading a written historical account of Caesar's triumph; cf. also L. Nicastrì, *Cornelio Gallo e l'elegia ellenistico-romana: Studio dei nuovi frammenti* (Naples, 1984), 103. Putnam's reading, however, has been furthered considerably by S. Mazzarino ("Un nuovo epigramma di Gallus e l'antica 'lettura epigraphica': Un problema di datazione," *QC* 2.3 [1980]: 7–50); J. K. Newman ("De novo Galli fragmento in Nubia eruto," *Latinitas* 28 [1980]: 83–94); J. Gómez Pallarès ("The Reading of Monuments in Cornelius Gallus' Fragment," *Philologus* 149 [2005]: 104–9); and later again by Putnam himself in *Artifices of Eternity: Horace's Fourth Book of Odes* (Cornell, 1986), p. 58, where he cites this quatrain as a parallel to this very ode of Horace; Courtney seems also to lean toward this interpretation in *FLP* (ad loc.). It is worth noting that, if my interpretation of the plain style of Gallus' encomium is correct, the language tends to support the epigraphical reading, since it is better suited to a man purporting to hold the monuments of Caesar's victory in awe, along with the rest of the crowd, than to a learned poet sitting down and reading about them in a historical treatise.

37. Fraenkel, *Horace* (n. 35 above), 440.

38. Kennedy, "Gallus," 371.